

**AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE**

**TO H.R. 3262**

**OFFERED BY M<sup>S</sup>. *KUSTER***

**(Grow Our Own Directive: Physician Assistant Employment  
and Education Act of 2017)**

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the  
following:

**1 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Grow Our Own Direc-  
3 tive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act  
4 of 2017”.

**5 SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL AS-**  
**6 SISTANCE TO PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS TO BE**  
**7 EMPLOYED AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VET-**  
**8 ERANS AFFAIRS.**

**9 (a) PILOT PROGRAM.—**

**10 (1) IN GENERAL.—**The Secretary of Veterans  
**11 Affairs shall carry out a pilot program to be known**  
**12 as the “Grow Our Own Directive” or “G.O.O.D.”**  
**13 pilot program (in this section referred to as the**  
**14 “pilot program”)** to provide educational assistance  
**15 to certain former members of the Armed Forces for**

1 education and training as physician assistants of the  
2 Department of Veterans Affairs.

3 (2) INFORMATION ON PILOT PROGRAM.—The  
4 Secretary shall provide information on the pilot pro-  
5 gram to eligible individuals under subsection (b), in-  
6 cluding information on application requirements and  
7 a list of entities with which the Secretary has  
8 partnered under subsection (g).

9 (b) ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.—An individual is eligi-  
10 ble to participate in the pilot program if the individual—

11 (1) has medical or military health experience  
12 gained while serving as a member of the Armed  
13 Forces;

14 (2) has received a certificate, associate degree,  
15 baccalaureate degree, master's degree, or  
16 postbaccalaureate training in a science relating to  
17 health care;

18 (3) is not eligible to participate in educational  
19 assistance under chapter 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, or 35  
20 of title 38, United States Code, or chapter 1606 or  
21 1607 of title 10, United States Code;

22 (4) has participated in the delivery of health  
23 care services or related medical services, including  
24 participation in military training relating to the

1 identification, evaluation, treatment, and prevention  
2 of diseases and disorders; and

3 (5) does not have a degree of doctor of medi-  
4 cine, doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of dentistry.

5 (c) DURATION.—The pilot program shall be carried  
6 out during the five-year period beginning on the date that  
7 is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

8 (d) SELECTION.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall select  
10 not less than 250 eligible individuals under sub-  
11 section (b) to participate in the pilot program.

12 (2) PRIORITY FOR SELECTION.—In selecting in-  
13 dividuals to participate in the pilot program under  
14 paragraph (1), the Secretary shall give priority to  
15 the following individuals:

16 (A) Individuals who participated in the In-  
17 termediate Care Technician Pilot Program of  
18 the Department that was carried out by the  
19 Secretary between January 2011 and February  
20 2015.

21 (B) Individuals who agree to be employed  
22 as a physician assistant for the Veterans Health  
23 Administration at a medical facility of the De-  
24 partment located in a community that—

1 (i) is designated as a medically under-  
2 served population under section  
3 330(b)(3)(A) of the Public Health Service  
4 Act (42 U.S.C. 254b(b)(3)(A)); and

5 (ii) is in a State with a per capita  
6 population of veterans of more than 9 per-  
7 cent according to the National Center for  
8 Veterans Analysis and Statistics and the  
9 United States Census Bureau.

10 (c) EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot  
12 program, the Secretary shall provide educational as-  
13 sistance to individuals participating in the pilot pro-  
14 gram, including through the use of scholarships, to  
15 cover the costs to such individuals of obtaining a  
16 master's degree in physician assistant studies or a  
17 similar master's degree.

18 (2) USE OF EXISTING PROGRAMS.—In pro-  
19 viding educational assistance under paragraph (1),  
20 the Secretary shall use the Department of Veterans  
21 Affairs Health Professionals Educational Assistance  
22 Program under chapter 76 of title 38, United States  
23 Code, and such other educational assistance pro-  
24 grams of the Department as the Secretary considers  
25 appropriate.

1           (3) USE OF SCHOLARSHIPS.—The Secretary  
2       shall provide not less than 35 scholarships under the  
3       pilot program to individuals participating in the pilot  
4       program during each year in which the pilot pro-  
5       gram is carried out.

6       (f) PERIOD OF OBLIGATED SERVICE.—

7           (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall enter  
8       into an agreement with each individual participating  
9       in the pilot program in which such individual agrees  
10      to be employed as a physician assistant for the Vet-  
11      erans Health Administration for a period of obli-  
12      gated service specified in paragraph (2).

13          (2) PERIOD SPECIFIED.—With respect to each  
14      individual participating in the pilot program, the pe-  
15      riod of obligated service specified in this paragraph  
16      for the individual is—

17           (A) if the individual is participating in the  
18      pilot program through a program described in  
19      subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of obli-  
20      gated service, the period specified with respect  
21      to such program; or

22           (B) if the individual is participating in the  
23      pilot program other than through a program  
24      described in such subsection, or if such program  
25      does not specify a period of obligated service, a

1 period of three years or such other period as  
2 the Secretary considers appropriate for pur-  
3 poses of the pilot program.

4 (g) BREACH.—

5 (1) LIABILITY.—Except as provided in para-  
6 graph (2), an individual who participates in the pilot  
7 program and fails to satisfy the period of obligated  
8 service under subsection (f) shall be liable to the  
9 United States, in lieu of such obligated service, for  
10 the amount that has been paid or is payable to or  
11 on behalf of the individual under the pilot program,  
12 reduced by the proportion that the number of days  
13 served for completion of the period of obligated serv-  
14 ice bears to the total number of days in the period  
15 of obligated service of such individual.

16 (2) EXCEPTION.—If an individual is partici-  
17 pating in the pilot program through a program de-  
18 scribed in subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of  
19 obligated service, the liability of the individual for  
20 failing to satisfy the period of obligated service  
21 under subsection (f) shall be determined as specified  
22 with respect to such program.

23 (h) MENTORS.—The Secretary shall ensure that a  
24 physician assistant mentor or mentors are available for in-  
25 dividuals participating in the pilot program at each facility

1 of the Veterans Health Administration at which a partici-  
2 pant in the pilot program is employed.

3 (i) PARTNERSHIPS.—In carrying out the pilot pro-  
4 gram, the Secretary shall seek to partner with the fol-  
5 lowing:

6 (1) Not less than 15 institutions of higher edu-  
7 cation that—

8 (A) offer a master's degree program in  
9 physician assistant studies or a similar area of  
10 study that is accredited by the Accreditation  
11 Review Commission on Education for the Phy-  
12 sician Assistant; and

13 (B) agree—

14 (i) to guarantee seats in such master's  
15 degree program for individuals partici-  
16 pating in the pilot program who meet the  
17 entrance requirements for such master's  
18 degree program; and

19 (ii) to provide individuals partici-  
20 pating in the pilot program with informa-  
21 tion on admissions criteria and the admis-  
22 sions process.

23 (2) Other institutions of higher education that  
24 offer programs in physician assistant studies or  
25 other similar areas of studies that are accredited by

1 the Accreditation Review Commission on Education  
2 for the Physician Assistant.

3 (3) The Transition Assistance Program of the  
4 Department of Defense.

5 (4) The Veterans' Employment and Training  
6 Service of the Department of Labor.

7 (5) Programs carried out under chapter 41 of  
8 title 38, United States Code, for the purpose of mar-  
9 keting and advertising the pilot program to veterans  
10 and members of the Armed Forces who may be in-  
11 terested in the pilot program.

12 (j) ADMINISTRATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—For pur-  
13 poses of carrying out the pilot program, the Secretary  
14 shall appoint or select within the Office of Physician As-  
15 sistant Services of the Veterans Health Administration the  
16 following:

17 (1) A Deputy Director for Education and Ca-  
18 reer Development of Physician Assistants who—

19 (A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and  
20 employed by the Department as of the date of  
21 the enactment of this Act;

22 (B) is responsible for—

23 (i) overseeing the pilot program;

24 (ii) recruiting candidates to partici-  
25 pate in the pilot program;



1 (iii) coordinating with individuals par-  
2 ticipating in the pilot program and assist-  
3 ing those individuals in applying and being  
4 admitted to a master's degree program  
5 under the pilot program; and

6 (iv) providing information to eligible  
7 individuals under subsection (b) with re-  
8 spect to the pilot program; and

9 (C) may be employed in the field at a med-  
10 ical center of the Department.

11 (2) A Deputy Director of Recruitment and Re-  
12 tention who—

13 (A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and  
14 employed by the Department as of the date of  
15 the enactment of this Act;

16 (B) is responsible for—

17 (i) identifying and coordinating the  
18 needs of the pilot program and assist the  
19 Secretary in providing mentors under sub-  
20 section (h) to participants in the pilot pro-  
21 gram; and

22 (ii) coordinating the staff of facilities  
23 of the Veterans Health Administration  
24 with respect to identifying employment po-

1                   sitions and mentors under subsection (h)  
2                   for participants in the pilot program; and  
3                   (C) may be employed in the field at a med-  
4                   ical center of the Department.

5                   (3) A recruiter who—

6                   (A) reports directly to the Deputy Director  
7                   of Recruitment and Retention; and

8                   (B) works with the Workforce Manage-  
9                   ment and Consulting Office and the Healthcare  
10                  Talent Management Office of the Veterans  
11                  Health Administration to develop and imple-  
12                  ment national recruiting strategic plans for the  
13                  recruitment and retention of physician assist-  
14                  ants within the Department.

15                  (4) An administrative assistant, compensated at  
16                  a rate not less than level GS-6 of the General  
17                  Schedule, or equivalent, who assists with administra-  
18                  tive duties relating to the pilot program in the Office  
19                  of Physician Assistant Services and such other du-  
20                  ties as determined by the Secretary to ensure that  
21                  the Office runs effectively and efficiently.

22                  (k) REPORT.—

23                  (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
24                  after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
25                  retary of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the

1 Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Defense, and  
2 the Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall  
3 submit to Congress a report on the pilot program.

4 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-  
5 graph (1) shall include the following:

6 (A) The extent to which the pilot program  
7 is effective in improving the ability of eligible  
8 individuals under subsection (b) to become phy-  
9 sician assistants;

10 (B) An examination of whether the pilot  
11 program is achieving the goals of—

12 (i) enabling individuals to build on  
13 medical skills gained as members of the  
14 Armed Forces by entering into the physi-  
15 cian assistant workforce of the Depart-  
16 ment; and

17 (ii) helping to meet the shortage of  
18 physician assistants employed by the De-  
19 partment.

20 (C) An identification of such modifications  
21 to the pilot program as the Secretary of Vet-  
22 erans Affairs, the Secretary of Labor, the Sec-  
23 retary of Defense, and the Secretary of Health  
24 and Human Services consider necessary to meet  
25 the goals described in subparagraph (B).

1 (D) An assessment of whether the pilot  
2 program could serve as a model for other pro-  
3 grams of the Department to assist individuals  
4 in obtaining certification and employment in  
5 other health care fields.

6 (I) SOURCE OF AMOUNTS.—Not less than \$8,000,000  
7 of the amount necessary to carry out the pilot program  
8 shall be derived from amounts appropriated to the Depart-  
9 ment of Veterans Affairs before the date of the enactment  
10 of this Act.

11 **SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDARDS FOR THE DEPART-**  
12 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR USING**  
13 **EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS TO**  
14 **EDUCATE AND HIRE PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS.**

15 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
16 shall establish standards described in subsection (b) to im-  
17 prove the use by the Department of Veterans Affairs of  
18 the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Professionals  
19 Educational Assistance Program under chapter 76 of title  
20 38, United States Code, and other educational assistance  
21 programs of the Department, including the pilot program  
22 under section 2, to educate and hire physician assistants  
23 of the Department.

24 (b) STANDARDS.—The standards described in this  
25 subsection are the following:

1           (1) Holding directors of medical centers of the  
2           Department accountable for failure to use the edu-  
3           cational assistance programs described in subsection  
4           (a) and other incentives—

5                   (Λ) to advance employees of the Depart-  
6                   ment in their education as physician assistants;  
7                   and

8                   (B) to improve recruitment and retention  
9                   of physician assistants.

10          (2) Ensuring that the Department of Veterans  
11          Affairs Education Debt Reduction Program under  
12          subchapter VII of chapter 76 of such title is avail-  
13          able for participants in the pilot program under sec-  
14          tion 2 to fill vacant physician assistant positions at  
15          the Department, including by—

16                   (A) including in all vacancy announce-  
17                   ments for physician assistant positions the  
18                   availability of the Education Debt Reduction  
19                   Program; and

20                   (B) informing applicants to physician as-  
21                   sistant positions of their eligibility for the Edu-  
22                   cation Debt Reduction Program.

23          (3) Monitoring compliance with the application  
24          process for educational assistance programs de-  
25          scribed in subsection (a) to ensure that such pro-

1       grams are being fully utilized to carry out this sec-  
2       tion.

3           (4) Creating programs, including through the  
4       use of the Department of Veterans Affairs Employee  
5       Incentive Scholarship Program under subchapter VI  
6       of chapter 76 of such title, to encourage employees  
7       of the Department to apply to accredited physician  
8       assistant programs.

9       (c) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall prescribe  
10     such regulations as the Secretary considers appropriate to  
11     carry out this section.

12     **SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF PAY GRADES FOR PHYSICIAN**  
13                     **ASSISTANTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VET-**  
14                     **ERANS AFFAIRS AND REQUIREMENT TO PRO-**  
15                     **VIDE COMPETITIVE PAY.**

16       (a) ESTABLISHMENT OF PAY GRADES.—Section  
17     7404(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by  
18     adding at the end the following:

      “PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SCHEDULE  
      “Physician Assistant IV.  
      “Physician Assistant III.  
      “Physician Assistant II.  
      “Physician Assistant I.”.

19       (b) COMPETITIVE PAY.—Section 7451(a)(2) of such  
20     title is amended—

21           (1) by redesignating subparagraph (B) as sub-  
22     paragraph (C);

1           (2) by inserting after subparagraph (A) the fol-  
2       lowing new subparagraph (B):

3                     “(B) Physician assistant.”; and

4           (3) in subparagraph (C), as redesignated by  
5       paragraph (1), by striking “and registered nurse”  
6       and inserting “registered nurse, and physician as-  
7       sistant”.

8       (c) NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN.—

9           (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans  
10       Affairs shall implement a national strategic plan for  
11       the retention and recruitment of physician assistants  
12       of the Department of Veterans Affairs that includes  
13       the establishment and adoption of standards for the  
14       provision of competitive pay to physician assistants  
15       of the Department in comparison to the pay of phy-  
16       sician assistants in the private sector.

17          (2) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the  
18       date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary  
19       shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs  
20       of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Af-  
21       fairs of the House of Representatives a report on the  
22       implementation of the national strategic plan under  
23       paragraph (1).

1 **SEC. 5. EXTENSION OF REQUIREMENT FOR COLLECTION**  
2 **OF FEES FOR HOUSING LOANS GUARANTEED**  
3 **BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

4 Section 3729(b)(2) of title 38, United States Code,  
5 is amended—

6 (1) in subparagraph (A)—

7 (A) in clause (iii), by striking “September  
8 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;  
9 and

10 (B) in clause (iv), by striking “September  
11 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;

12 (2) in subparagraph (B)—

13 (A) in clause (i), by striking “September  
14 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;  
15 and

16 (B) in clause (ii), by striking “September  
17 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;

18 (3) in subparagraph (C)—

19 (A) in clause (i), by striking “September  
20 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;  
21 and

22 (B) in clause (ii), by striking “September  
23 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;

24 and

25 (4) in subparagraph (D)—



- 1 (A) in clause (i), by striking “September
- 2 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;
- 3 and
- 4 (B) in clause (ii), by striking “September
- 5 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”.

